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ABSTRACT

Curriculum developers and planners must realize that speaking, reading, writing, and related linguistic processes are instrumental in all areas of learning. In university departments, teachers of content subjects and language specialists should look at the curriculum as a whole. English specialists must institute a policy of language across the curriculum, and subject specialists need to be aware of the linguistic process by which students acquire information and understanding. The education of the students should be regarded as the responsibility of all academic staff within and across departments, not just of the individuals charged with teaching those students. Although this would be more difficult, it would be a more professional approach and would assure the success of language across the curriculum. (MSE)

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RELC Seminar
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ENGLISH ACROSS THE UNIVERSITY CURRICULUM

Introduction

Alan Bullock's A Language for Life: Report of the Committee of Inquiry, Department of Education and Science, 1975[1] and specifically the chapters regarding 'language across the curriculum' provide guidance and focus for English specialists and curriculum planners to move in the same direction -- i.e. to emphasise the central role of language in the education of every stage of a student's career -- from primary to tertiary. Whilst English specialists and teachers had in the past studied and written much about the teaching of languages, especially English as a second or foreign language, they had seldom considered the role of English (or any language) in relation to the other content subjects in the curriculum. English was treated purely as a subject in the curriculum, and although content subjects were taught in English, they were simply compartmentalised as individual subjects in the time-table. English language teachers found themselves as isolated individuals, having little or nothing to do with history or science teachers. There was little interdisciplinary communication, each content subject teacher jealousy guarding its sphere of influence. There was much 'politics of the curriculum' but little integration of interests. Barnes[2] could perhaps be accredited for being one of the first persons to do educational research on language as the most subtle and pervasive of the means by which we teachers and students present our assumptions about role, about subject-matter, and about the people we talk to, at and with. Barnes' research was aimed at finding answers to the most important question in 'language across the curriculum': what can we learn about learning by looking at the language of our classrooms. A 'discussion document' in the revised edition of Barnes, Britton and Rosen's book, designed to bring together teachers of all subjects in a common 'language policy' within the educational institution, thus becomes the working paper of language education where English is the medium of instruction.

With Bullock's Report 'A Language for Life' and Barnes' 'Discussion Document', educationists, both language and content teachers, began to do surveys and look for answers by researching and examining case studies in the field of 'Language across the curriculum'[3]. At the school level, the Schools Council of the U.K. has produced a large number of discussion pamphlets: Language and Learning in the Humanities, Writing in Science, From Information to Understanding, From Talking to Writing, Keeping Options Open, Why Write? and Language Policies in Schools: Aspects and Approaches. Discussion of the Bullock Report and its implementation were published[4]. One of the most interesting of these reports was Schools Council Working Paper 67: Irene Roberton's Language Across the Curriculum: Four Case Studies 1980. This report described the work of four schools, examining the attitudes of headteachers, the delegation of responsibility and the role of working parties. Detailed accounts were given of lessons in subject areas such as science, mathematics, history, and English language, and approaches were discussed.

University Curriculum

As with the schools, universities and colleges ought to be concerned with this issue of language across the curriculum, especially if one particular

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language is used as the medium of instruction. The problem is perhaps less pronounced in universities where the native language is also the medium of instruction, as in Japanese, Thai and Indonesian universities. In universities such as NUS, where the medium of instruction is not the native language of the country, problems relating to language and its use in the curriculum require close scrutiny and consideration.

The philosophy, structure, methodology, curriculum of a university are somewhat different from those of the schools; a university or college is not purely an extension of the schools though its students are end-products of the junior colleges and pre-university schools.

Much of the philosophy of university education has been well documented[5] and the mass of research which has been carried out in the U.S.A. by international agencies and in Britain[6] on higher education is impressive. University autonomy and academic freedom, two privileges of the university, set it apart from the school. However, with expansion and establishment of new institutions of higher education, universities here and abroad cannot afford to remain 'ivory towers'. Universities are now too dependent on public funds to remain insensitive to the dictates of local, national governments. They are expected to make their courses relevant, and to meet manpower needs. Thus, under changed conditions, most university teachers are expected to teach, and do research on areas relevant to the society. Research for the sake of research seems to be on the way out. As universities have to open their 'ivory gates' to meet increasing demand for places and relevant job-oriented courses, curricula and courses have to change in tandem. Changing curricula and courses demand several changes, particularly that of attitudes on the part of teachers at all levels. University teachers must play a more active and self-conscious role in educational development and inquiry, becoming alert to the need of research into teaching methods and students' learning. Though teachers should participate actively in shaping the educational process in the universities, students and employers also have a part to play in discussion prior to the making of educational decisions with feedback and evaluation of courses and lecturers.

Curriculum studies which subsequently influences curriculum change in the university is a complex matter. Part of the complexity lies in the 'politics of curriculum': who controls the curriculum? and why? The levels of curriculum decision-making in the university are four-fold: university (senate), institutional (faculty/school), departmental (individual departments) and individual staff (the teacher in the lecture-room).

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Decisions about Curriculum (University)

Level	Decisions about	Decisions made by	Assessment
1. University Senate	Guidelines, Coordination and implementation	Senate	External & Internal Standards
2. Faculty & School	The Whole Curriculum	Faculty Academic Boards/Deaneries	Self-assessment and moderation
3. Department	Syllabuses	All lecturers in department	Collegial examinations
4. Staff	Lessons & Methods	Individual lecturers	Teacher : Student Records of Programme

Figure One

It seems clear that lecturers and tutors ultimately have the greatest control because they make the most crucial decisions facing the students in the lecture room. But they need to make these individual decisions about lesson content and teaching methods in accordance with the syllabus decisions made by their departmental colleagues, and in accordance with the 'whole curriculum' decisions made by the rest of their colleagues in the faculty or school (academic boards/deaneries which make decisions about academic policy). The faculty or school is guided by the Senate which facilitates rather than restricts curriculum planning.

Such a scheme of curriculum decision-making for the university as a whole and for the faculty/department in particular is based on the 'definition' of the university curriculum as 'a selection from the culture of a society, i.e. certain aspects of our man-made world are thought of as so important that they should be passed on to the next generation'[7]. The principles, whereby selection from a culture is made, generally follow the model below:

Stages in Curriculum Selection

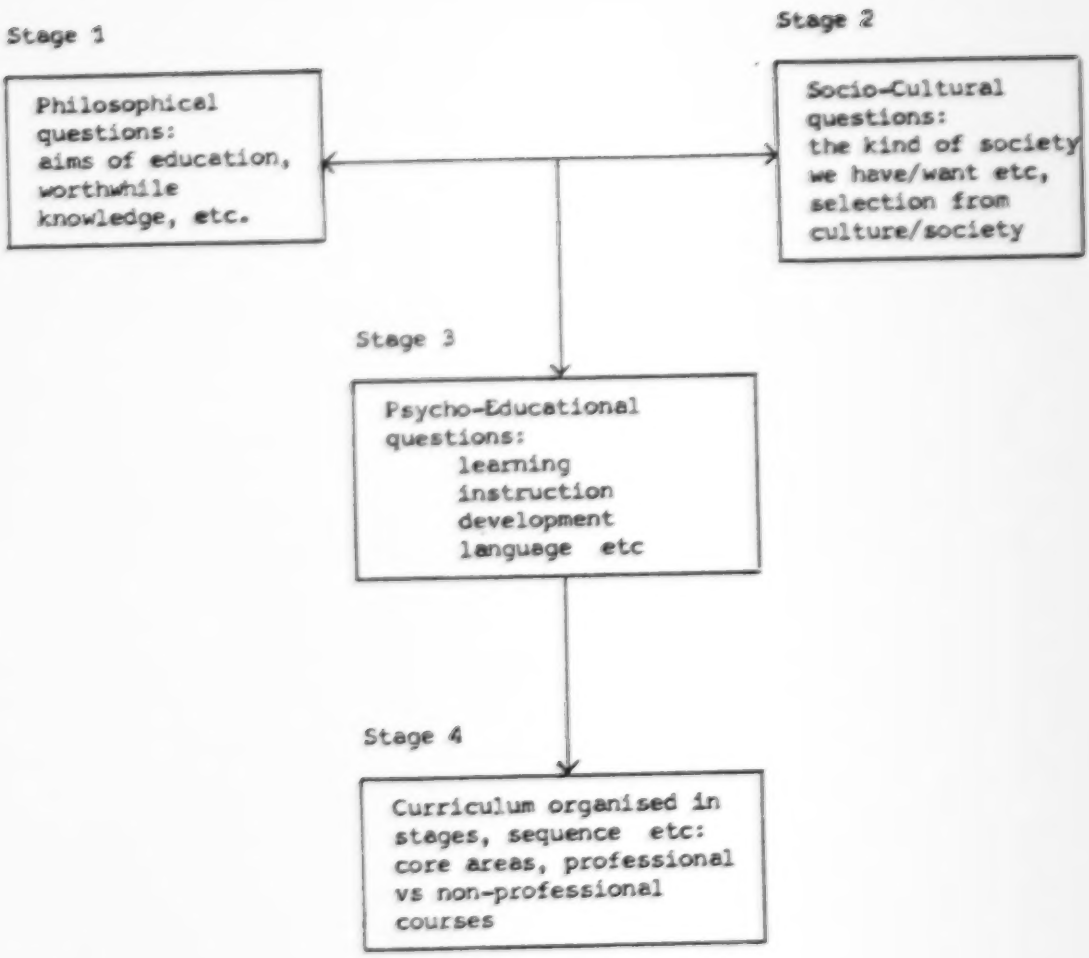

Figure Two

At each stage of the development of a university curriculum, several questions are asked and answered, and these issues are fundamental for university teachers. Stage 1, largely philosophical, deals with questions about the structure of knowledge and how this relates to what should be taught and questions about why some kinds of knowledge and experience are more worthwhile and desirable than others.

Stage 2 deals with particular concerns in our society: a scientific, technological, industrial society which is democratic-socialist and multi-cultural. 2 questions, 'what should be taught?' and 'to whom knowledge should be made available?', are intricately related to questions in stage 1. Stage 3, which is psycho-educational, has much to do with the type of

curriculum we design for our university students, bearing in mind such questions as 'What are our aims?' 'what do we mean by worthwhile?' 'what kind of presures in society should we be influenced by and which should we resist?' 'What situations will students be faced with when they leave the university?' Hence, Stage 3 is the stage of making the selection from the culture. Finally, stage 4 brings into operation all the theories and ideas of knowledge and intellectual development and those of theory of instruction, leading to the final stage of curriculum planning.

These issues are fundamental questions for university curriculum planners and teachers to consider: namely what to teach, how to teach, what to teach to whom. Ruth Beard[8] in discussing courses, curricula and objectives of university work provides a table (see Appendix 1), which shows the intricate relationship between knowledge (content of different disciplines), language skills (English in the case of NUS) and attitudes (awareness, interest, value).

University teaching and learning are educational processes, and the shaping of these processes concerns the curriculum planners, teachers and students. Developments and innovations initiated by university teachers are based on general concepts of the current situations and those of the future. As courses become more inter-disciplinary (see Figure Three for course organisation in NUS), knowledge becomes more inte-grated and the demand for skills becomes increasingly sophisticated. The function and role of English in the curriculum of the university for the development of skills of verbalization (to write coherently, to be verbally articulate, to make independent judgments, to think, to develop adaptability etc) take on added significance and importance.

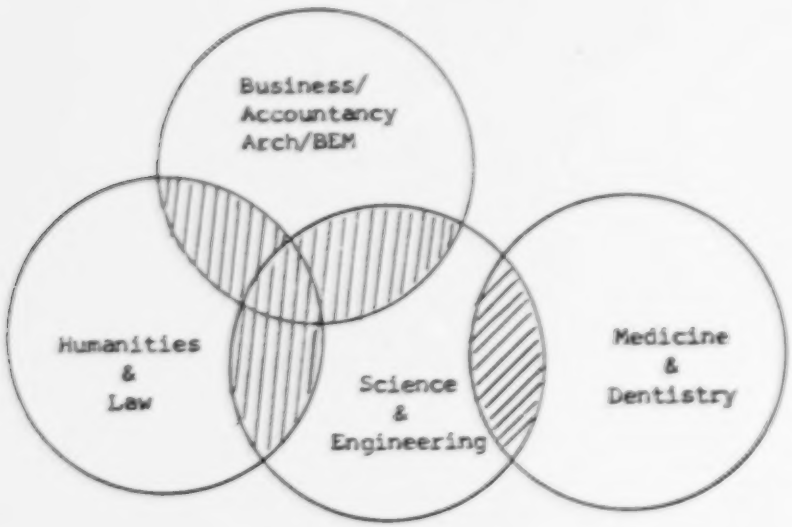

Figure Three

Common Area
Multi-disciplinary curriculum

Specialist curriculum

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English in the University Curriculum

In the university, where English is the sole working language through which knowledge and skills are obtained, Bullock's A Language for Life is an extremely important document for curriculum planning and development. What is said of the English language (for living and for learning) at the primary and secondary levels applies to the tertiary level, where in the case of NUS and NTI, English is the language for learning of content subjects as well as for living and working.

The likelihood that linguistic division in a multi-racial society will lead to political conflict is particularly great where 'the language cleavages'[9] are linked with the presence of a dominant group, blocking social mobility of members of a subordinate group, partly on the basis of language factors. Although English is the 'preferred' language among 4 official languages in Singapore, it is an adopted language and is not divisive in the sense that all groups, Chinese, Malay, Indian are more or less equally handicapped by it. Since English is recognized and used as the language of living and learning, the general populace and university teachers in particular should recognize the inescapable fact that it is language that is the critically determining factor in students' capacity to learn, and later to use it for earning a living[10].

The recognition of the role/function of English in the university curriculum has great impact on curriculum planning and organisation. The following points become critical factors for our examination of 'language across the curriculum':

(a) the central role to the played by language in the work of English departments (ELPU and ELL in NUS),

(b) those who teach the language (English) should not carry sole responsibility for the learners' operational command of the language, written and spoken; all teachers should recognize the part played by language in their own tutorial or lecture rooms,

(c) while the teacher of English makes general contribution toward this operational command, every teacher (of whatever discipline) should contribute in terms of the language needs of his own situation,

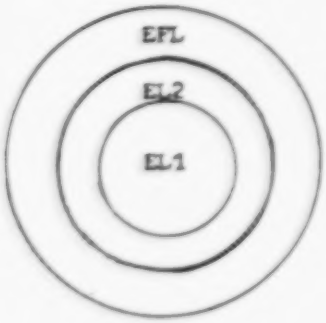
(d) all teachers and all subjects (humanities or sciences or technologies) create language needs particular to themselves;

and (e) students' capacity to use language for learning and living.

Thus a linguistic approach to the language needs and the language problems of lecturers and students in communicating knowledge and skills and in learning will enable us to examine more accurately this question of the use of English across the university curriculum.

To emphasise, in the university curriculum, language for learning and living is not to introduce great curriculum change or innovation; after all, as the philosopher Max Black said 'Man is the only animal that can talk ... He alone can bridge the gap between one person and another,

conveying thoughts, feelings, desires, attitudes, and sharing in the traditions, the knowledge and the superstition of his culture ... On this essential skill depends everything we call civilisation. Without it, imagination, thought — even self-knowledge — are impossible.' Indeed, in most universities and colleges, linguistic competence in the language of instruction is assumed, as very often it is the native language of the lecturers and the students. Such is not the case in our higher institutions of learning where at best the language medium is the first language to some students, a second or foreign language to many more. The linguistic proficiency of NUS students in English, the medium of instruction and communication can be seen from the following chart:



The 'inner circle'[11] of EL1 students (those who can use English as a first language — or translated in grade terms GP 1-3) constitutes about 25% of NUS students. The 'outer (or extended) circle' of EL2 students (those who can use English as a second language — i.e. those with GP 4-9 and students from the non-English medium) constitutes about 55%, and the 'extending circle' of EFL students (those who can use English as a foreign language — ASEAN and other foreign students) constitutes approximately 20%. Such a linguistic profile of the NUS student body, general as it is, makes the upgrading of linguistic competence in English of approximately 80% of the student body necessary.

The nature and function of language (English) as a medium of teaching, learning and living suggest two main objectives in the context of a university curriculum:

(a) to show what characterizes the varieties of language, ways of speaking as well as ways of writing that arise specifically in the context of university work (lectures, tutorials, workshops, examinations etc),

(b) to show how these varieties (EAP, ESP, EST etc) of English relate to the ways in which the language is used for living in the context of family, community (business, industry, work) and society.

It seems obvious that a lecturer, whatever his own particular responsibilities in his discipline needs to understand the part played by language in the work of every area of the curriculum. If he is a management specialist, he ought to understand the language of business and if he is

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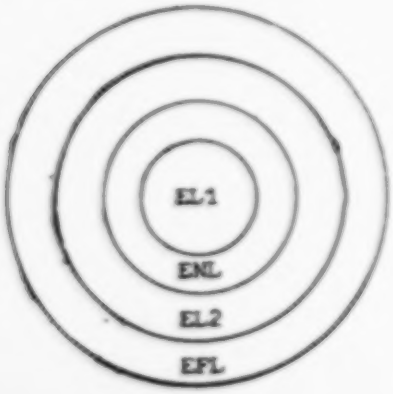
an engineering professor, he should understand the use of language in technical communication and report writing. In general, the use of English across the university curriculum ought to be understood by all teachers so that there is general awareness of the intimate relationship between the two aspects of language in use: language for living and language for learning.

English is the medium of instruction for most curriculum content in the university (except for some courses in Chinese, Malay and Japanese studies), including itself, hence it is a major part of the learning environment. Except for the language specialists and some interested content lecturers, the role of language in the learning environment is not generally understood. It is difficult to create or design environments where students are motivated by a powerful communicative intent or where students and lecturers can use language in ways which extend the verbal repertoire of students.

The varieties of language used by students and lecturers create immense difficulties in the learning environments. Whilst it might be relatively easy to create learning environments with students where the norm is standard English (inspite of the students' English as L_1, L_2 or foreign language background), it is not easy nor indeed feasible to expect content teachers to follow this norm in their teaching. It is not insurmountable to blur the linguistic differences of EL1, EL2 and EFL students within a year or two in the university so that they can compete equally in the learning environments but it is almost impossible to do that with staff in their teaching environments.

As reported in the Campus News (December 1984, issue No. 34), more than half of the NUS's academics come from overseas, comprising some 670 academics from nearly 30 countries. They come mainly from Malaysia, Britain, India and the United States. A smaller number are from Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Canada, Australia, HongKong, Taiwan and European countries like West Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and Norway. Such a 'cosmopolitan academic community' implies linguistic differences in the use of English for instruction. The language varieties range from the use of English as a native language (such as British English, American English and Australian English) to that of English as a foreign language (such as Bangladeshi English and Taiwanese English). The following chart makes clear the intelligibility of such a great variety of English use to university students.



EL1: used by Singaporean/Malaysian teachers

ENL: used by Native-speakers of English

EL2: used by Indian/European teachers

EFL: used by Taiwanese/Bangladeshi teachers

Whilst nothing much can be done about the varieties of English used by staff, English language teachers can and must do something about the linguistic proficiency and varieties of English of students. With the prevailing situation in NUS, which makes the upgrading of English (so that lectures and tutorials are learned and communication facilitated) a task, 3 criteria for analysing the role of English in learning environments are necessary:

(a) situational appropriateness
(b) functional effectiveness
(c) aesthetic taste

This set of criteria seems adequate for the language tasks students have to accomplish in the current learning environment. In order that norms of interaction among students and teachers are maintained (inspite of linguistic differences and lectal variation) and that probable differences in speech patterns and behaviours are minimised, the language programmes are geared to teaching standard English and to making students aware of the stylistic/linguistic shifts in learning environments so as to adapt to varieties of speech style and speech behaviour of a set of teachers with different language backgrounds.

The content and organisation of courses are matters to be decided by university administrations, specialist professional bodies and staff of departments concerned. The actual teaching lies with the departments and individual teachers, whose methods of instruction are often different from those of staff of other departments and faculties. Though lecturing and tutorial discussion are common features of most courses, there are some specific methods which suit certain courses and not others. For example, in the faculties of engineering and science, laboratory and industrial workshops and field work are required components of courses. The point made here is that courses in English, in order to satisfy the criteria of situational appropriateness/functional effectiveness/ aesthetic taste, must be geared to the particular needs of each faculty. For 'language across the curriculum' to become effective in the university, English language teachers must know what's happening in each faculty, what methods of instruction are used by the lecturers and what socio-linguistic rules of language use apply. The learning environment of each faculty will not repress participatory skills of students if they have been instructed in such skills of interaction by English teachers.

In order to provide detailed guidance which lecturers require in teaching their own subjects, professional bodies might be asked to prepare reports in which highly competent teachers describe methods which they have found most effective in teaching specific topics and discuss alternative methods favoured by others. In the universities, professional bodies could contribute to the study of curricula in the light of professional demands and of modern developments, and in laying down guidelines concerning objectives, teaching techniques and methods of assessing learning. The English specialists, with such knowledge of learning and teaching techniques of each faculty, will no doubt be in a better position to help students weak in language to solve problems which arise because of their inability to obtain relevant knowledge and skills and to participate fully in the learning process.

Language enters the curriculum in two ways: (a) as the communication

system of the classroom or lectureroom and university and (b) as a means of learning[12]. In (a) the sharing of meaning, knowledge and skill between teacher and student is communication, there is a breakdown of this sharing if either the teacher or the student or both do not have the prerequisites of language to do so. In (b) the student or learner actively participates in the making and sharing of meaning, which will fail if he has little knowledge of or skill in the required language. Thus much of the failure in learning can be attributed to the lack of language proficiency in both staffs and students.

Students learn through language in a communication system which concerns classroom relationships and discourse, and students' interpretation of what the teacher does or says. It is mutual interpretation on both sides which gives rise to learning. The language which the teacher uses to communicate knowledge and skill and the range of language strategies which students must apply in learning tasks are norms for communication in any curriculum. In the university, the nature and function of English in the curriculum are very much assumed; it is up to the English specialist to instruct students on how to cope with learning tasks and language application (the content lecturers deal only with their area of specialisation). But specialist lecturers need to know how to set up norms for communication in their lectures and tutorials and to understand how these affect their students' learning.

A curriculum is the shaping of understanding, beliefs and values which goes on in any institution of learning. It concerns teachers' objectives, choices of content and method on the one hand, and students' objectives, beliefs and values on the other. The tool with which curriculum is effected is communication (teacher-student and student-teacher). Without communication, little learning, inadequate reshaping of attitudes and values and stunted growth in cultural and social life would result.

Concluding Remarks

In curriculum innovation and development, course organisers and planners need to take note of the fact that speaking, reading, writing and related linguistic processes are instrumental in <u>all</u> areas of learning, and that 'language learning and learning a subject are complementary, symbiotic developments'[13]. Thus in university departments, professors and lecturers of content subjects and language specialists should look at the curriculum as a whole. Students should be regarded as the responsibility of <u>all</u> academic staff in a department and across departments, not just the one who is allocated to teach that particular group of students. This would represent a major step towards true professionalism. Though this would make teachers' tasks more onerous, it is worth the effort as success in 'language across the university curriculum' would be assured.

Linguists and educationists understand the complexity of how learners use language. They also recognize the importance of sociolinguistics in the understanding of 'shared social context of language use'. These diverse viewpoints, however, converge in their recognition of the fact that language and the human condition are inseperable. In the university, English specialists need to institute 'a policy of language across the curriculum', and the subject specialists need to be aware of the linguistic process by which their students acquire information and understanding as well as the 'reading demands of their own subjects and ways in which the students can be helped to meet them'[14].

APPENDIX 1

Objectives in university education (for consideration and comment)

Objectives	Teaching method or student activity	Evaluation or feedback
Knowledge		
At the end of a university career, a student should:		
know the basic terminology of his subject	lectures; assigned reading; practicals; demonstrations, etc.	multiple-choice-question examinations; correct use of forms in essays, discussion, etc.
know the principles (basic laws and concepts) of his subject understand some of the uses to which his subject is put	lectures; assigned reading; practicals; demonstration, etc. contact with research, industry, professionals in own field; experiments, projects, where appropriate	correct reference to laws, etc. arguments; essay writing, etc. informative assessment of project essays, etc.
be acquainted with principles and application of releted subjects	general studies; background reading	synthesis of data from various sources
Skills		
University teaching in general should enable the student:		
to write coherently	essays; laboratory reports; dissertations; papers to be given in tutorials	informative assessment of those
to be verbally articulate	giving papers; effective argument in discussion groups; tutorials, etc.	criticism by other students and tutors
to make his own independent judgements	meets contradictions; contrasting points of view; use of discussion to expose student's assumptions, etc.	e.g. 'compare and contrast' questions in examinations; evaluation of arguments, etc.
to obtain information efficiently	use of library, abstracts, etc.; preperation for essays, projects; open-ended experiments	informative comment on performance; open-book examinations

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to think creatively, imaginatively and in abstract terms	research projects; tackling unsolved problems; use of concepts in arguments, discussion	quality of writing (publications?); assessment of method in tackling problems; credit for originality
to cooperate with colleagues and other professionals in future career	joint projects; role playing: group discussion to give insight into group interactions	evaluation of student's behaviour in a group by tutors and other students
to develop adaptability, i.e. to cope with changing patterns of knowledge (both general technological advance and new ideas in own subject)	exposure to new ideas (not accepting everything given as 'facts')	follow up after graduation

Attitudes

An aim in university teaching is to foster in the student:

enthusiasm for learning	non-assigned reading; extracurricular meetings (e.g. science clubs)	extent of extracurricular activity; posing new problems for own investigation
scholarly concern for accuracy	contact with teachers and researchers displaying such accuracy; continuous checking of own results	assign marks for accuracy in examinations
awareness of moral, social, economic, political and scientific problems of society	general studies; some projects; modern history, literature, sociology	impressionistically, from student's writing and discussion

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